The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about myths and legends

仙 (radical 亻 = 仁 ren = person)

Pronunciation: xian (Putonghua, 1st tone), sin (Cantonese, 1st tone)

Basic meaning: fairy, immortal

仙 is opposite of 凡 (fan = ordinary/mortals): 仙镜 (xian jing = fairy-realm), 仙草 (xian cao = magic-grass/herb), 仙樂 (xian yue = fairy/heavenly-music). In 傳說 (chuan shuo = pass-on-talk = legends), 神仙 (shen xian = gods/spirits-fairies = 仙人 xian ren = fairy-people = immortals) can 騰雲駕霧 (teng yun jia wu = soar-cloud-ride-mist = fly), use 仙法 (xian fa = fairy-method = magic).

Taoist priests 煉仙 (lian xian = practice-alchemy-to-attain-fairyhood), concoct 仙藥 (xian yao = fairy/immortal-elixir), make 仙丹 (xian dan = fairy-pills). 八仙 (ba xian = Eight-Immortals) are eight popular fairy characters.

Beautiful 狐仙 (hu xian = fox-fairies) bewitch men. In orgasm/LSD-affected state we feel 欲仙欲死 (yu xian yu si = feel-almost-like-fairy-feel-almost-like-dying).

by Diana Yue